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SUBJECT: ABU MAZEN COMES TO BAGHDAD - FINALLY

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b).

¶1. (U) After repeated delays caused by conflicting schedules, the Gaza crisis, and most recently a press leak, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) visited Baghdad April 5 -- his first as President of the Palestinian Authority and the first by a Palestinian leader since the 2003 fall of Saddam. During the 6-hour visit, Abbas (accompanied by Sa'eb Erekat, Nabil Abu Rudeinah, Yasser Abed Rabbo and Mahmoud Habbash) met first with President Talabani who hosted a lunch for him that included, among others, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, Foreign Minister Zebari, Minister of Defense Abdel Qader, ISCI heir apparent Amar al-Hakim, and Sunni Parliamentarian Adnan al-Dulaymi. The Palestinian delegation also met Prime Minister Maliki, and then with Vice Presidents Tareq al-Hashmi and Adel Abdel Mehdi. Iraqi media provided extensive coverage of the visit with the main story line focusing on Iraqi pledges of support for the Palestinian cause and Palestinian support for Iraq and for the well being of Palestinians in Iraq.

¶2. (U) In a joint press conference, President Talabani said "the Iraqi people have always been heart and soul with the Palestinian people, hoping to play a true historic role in realizing the goal for which the Palestinian people are struggling, represented by establishing an independent Palestinian state on the land of Palestine with holy Jerusalem as its capital." In response, Abbas said "We are not strangers to each other because Iraq -- history, civilization, and people -- has always stood by the side of the Palestinian people. Many landmarks on Palestinian territory stand witness to the valiant role the brave Iraqi people and army played toward the Palestinian question." PM Maliki, following his meeting with Abbas, pledged that Iraq is ready to "provide all means of support to the Palestinians, in order to allow them to build an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, where displaced Palestinians can come back home to." On the specific issue of Palestinians in Iraq, Abbas offered praise to the GOI stating "the Iraqi government considers them as part of the Iraqi people and part of the government's concern and a part of Iraqi security. We are sure they are in safe hands."

¶3. (C) Talabani told the Charge April 5 evening that Abu Mazen had wanted financial and political support. According to Talabani, the Iraqis promised to provide some oil at the same discount price as allowed to Jordan. Talabani added that Abu Mazen's theme on the political side was that Israel before had claimed there was no Palestinian partner with whom to negotiate. Now, however, there is a Palestinian partner ready but no Israeli. Charge expressed U.S. appreciation to Talabani for Iraq's support for Abu Mazen.

¶4. (C) Comment: Abu Mazen's visit to Baghdad has been a long-standing objective for the Palestinians, for the Iraqis and for us. As the latest Arab leader to come to Baghdad, his visit further bolsters the perception -- and hopefully the reality -- of Iraq's reintegration into the neighborhood. Whether it has strengthened the hand of the PA and Abu Mazen himself, we defer to ConGen Jerusalem for its assessment.

15. (C) Comment continued: Beyond the usual rhetorical flourishes and public gestures of mutual admiration, Abbas appears to have come away from the visit with the results he sought and perhaps one tangible result. His Chief of Protocol, Ambassador Abdel Karim Ewaida told poloff the visit was meant to show Abbas as a strong leader, unafraid to come to Baghdad, and that Palestinian-Iraqi relations had left Qto Baghdad, and that Palestinian-Iraqi relations had left behind the disastrous Saddam-Arafat legacy of the past and are moving toward a new period of cooperation. If true, the provision of discounted oil would be a concrete sign that the Iraqis appear ready to do more offer words of support, we are puzzled, however, how Iraq would be able to implement the offer in a meaningful way. Iraq exports only nominal amounts of crude oil to Jordan. The Palestinians would not be able to make use of crude oil, and Iraq currently exports no refined product, such as kerosene and diesel.

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